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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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The media this morning is still dominated by reports of a possible and imminent prisoner exchange deal between Hamas and Israel in which Gilad Shalit will be released. In light of strict censorship imposed on the impending deal, the Israeli media are still mostly basing their information on the foreign media outlets, mainly

Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, which provide a breakdown of which prisoners and other demands are said to be the last obstacles to finalizing the deal.

Ma'ariv reports that Prime Minister Netanyahu made efforts to lower expectations yesterday and also promised that the cabinet would have final say on approving the deal. The newspapers point out that there already appears to be a majority of 16 members in the cabinet in favor of a deal, even though its details are not yet known, with four opposed and nine ministers still uncommitted. Alex Fishman in Yediot Ahronot points out that after the cabinet approves the deal and the list of prisoners is made public, it will be possible to petition the High Court of Justice against the release of one prisoner or another over the course of 48 hours. He notes that in the past, the High Court tended to reject such petitions on the grounds that it does not meddle in government decisions on this subject.

Israel Hayom provides articles in favor of and against the expected deal. Opposing the deal is former director of the POW department in the Mossad, Rami Igra, who calls it "a massive release of all the greatest murderers in the last and present century and, on the other hand, a shameless and bottomless surrender to Hamas's demands." Writing in favor of a deal, Amos Regev opines that since it was impossible to free Gilad Shalit by means of a rescue operation, a deal is the only option left.

Barak Ravid in Haaretz reports this morning that Prime Minister Netanyahu has decided to freeze construction in the settlements for 10 months and is considering bringing the matter up for a cabinet vote. The report says that Netanyahu informed the U.S. administration of his position and is hopeful that such a statement would bring to renewed talks with the Palestinian Authority.

Block Quotes:

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Mideast:

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#### II. "A Painful Test that We Will Pass"

Amos Regev, Editor-in-Chief of the independent Israel Hayom opined (11/24): Gilad Shalit must return home to the bosom of his family. Period. It would have been better had this happened by means of a bold rescue operation. But that didn't happen. And that's why we have to bring him home in a deal. I have no information to judge whether the non-execution of a rescue operation was due to the lack of intelligence information... I also don't know the distance that IDF soldiers were from the place of Gilad Shalit's captivity during Operation Cast Lead... And that's why only the option of a deal is left. [This deal] is not the best option in the whole world... In contrast to arguments made yesterday, setting a few hundred despicable terrorists free will not change the balance of forces in the Middle East. The deal will be a painful test. We will pass it.

#### II. "The Deal that Will Change the Region"

Rami Igra, former director of the POW department in the Mossad wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (11/24): "The deal being worked out... includes a number of components on which we should focus a bit more with more profound judgment. On the one hand... there will be a massive release of all the greatest murderers. On the other hand, this is shameless and bottomless surrender to Hamas's demands. The deal can lead to the following: It restores to the combat ranks the greatest murderers, [who] will return to activity and that the price will be hundreds of people killed in the future. The deal teaches the Palestinians that the only way to deal with Israel is by using force, and in their view, this is the winning method... We are giving an ideological seal of approval to extremists and damaging the Palestinian peace seekers. The Shalit deal is... a strategic step that will affect future events in the region. Netanyahu... must take an example from Olmert, who was not seduced by a momentary and populist approach. By the time of the next elections, the results of this deal will be known, and Netanyahu will not be able to latch onto the glory of the present."

#### III. "Act and be heard"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (11/24):  
"Reports of significant progress toward a deal for exchanging Gilad Shalit have multiplied recently. All these reports, however, come from foreign sources... Behind the delicate term "blackout" stands some serious censorship. Perhaps it is best to conduct the negotiations... in secret to prevent the chorus of naysayers from paralyzing the government and halting a deal. But the details that have leaked out and the vigorous rumor mill surrounding the issue keep that scenario from happening and the potential damage caused by secrecy is great... it seems that a large majority of Israelis... are willing... to set free even the most heinous of murderers to end Shalit's suffering... It is unclear why Netanyahu, Barak, and other ministers... refrain from disclosing the data without which public debate on the subject is pointless... It's difficult to accept comprehensive censorship whose purpose - or at least its result - is to influence the public's position on a deal... The Israeli public carries a burden and responsibility. It must not settle for faits accomplis. It must hear, know, and make a considered decision before action is taken."

#### IV. "The Shame of Capitulation"

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (11/24): "Dear ministers, after a long brainwashing, the decision now moves to you. It is said that there will be an automatic majority in the cabinet. Indeed? Will you also lend a hand to the disgrace? The proposal on the cabinet's table should be called by its real name: surrender. The Israeli government wishes to kneel before Hamas and to surrender to all its whims. The anti-Semitic terror organization will dictate the terms of surrender to the State of Israel... This won't happen next time, they try to tell you and us. Israel will set new rules. New rules? Why is the blood of the next soldier to be kidnapped worth less than the blood of Gilad Shalit?... We can understand the family. But Gilad Shalit has long since stopped being a matter of one family. That is precisely the reason why his price went up... You, dear ministers, can stop the madness. You are there in order to serve the national interest. Not to surrender to emotional whims... Honorable ministers, Gilad Shalit's release is a supreme interest, deserving of every effort. But there is an abyss of difference between "every effort" and "any price." If you have any independent thinking ability left, then please do not confuse between the two, when you go to vote.  
CUNNINGHAM